



**Testimony of Executive Director Randy Newcomb  
Kentucky Lake Convention and Visitors Bureau  
before the  
Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy, and Environment of the  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
July 27, 2018**

Good afternoon distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Randy Newcomb, and I am the Executive Director of the Kentucky Lake Convention and Visitors Bureau and the current Chairman of the Kentucky Travel Industry Association. It is an honor to be with you today, and I thank you for the opportunity to discuss the negative impact Asian Carp are having on the tourism industry in Kentucky and more specifically tourism in the Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley areas of Western Kentucky.

Tourism in Kentucky generates an economic impact of over \$15 billion annually, supports nearly 200,000 Kentucky jobs and provides \$1.57 billion in local and state tax revenue. In the Western Lakes and Rivers Region of Kentucky (a fifteen county region around Kentucky and Barkley Lakes), tourism generates close to \$1 billion annually and supports nearly 12,000 Kentucky jobs. Even more locally, in the area I directly represent, Marshall County, tourism generates close to \$157.8 million in total tourist spending, provides over \$16.5 million in state and local tax revenue, and supports over 2,700 Kentucky jobs.

Although these numbers are strong, our industry is fragile. Prospective visitors, including fishermen, fishing tournaments and boaters, have options in other states and the competition with those states is intense. The proliferation of Asian Carp in Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley is beginning to diminish our status as a world-class destination for bass and crappie fishing, as well as a location for fishing tournaments.

Fishing has become very difficult on our lakes, and the Asian Carp are playing a major role. Asian Carp have already disrupted the food chain on Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley. Threadfin shad, once abundant prey for gamefish, including black bass, are almost non-existent in the lakes. That means there is less forage for juvenile gamefish. Continued unchecked, this will be disastrous for the lakes and communities that depend upon them.

The decline in the quality of fishing, largely attributed to the Asian Carp, is beginning to have a negative impact on bass tournaments. FLW, the world's largest tournament fishing organization headquartered in Benton, Kentucky, holds more than 300 bass tournaments annually in nine countries. This year, 17 of those tournaments were held in Kentucky, with 11 of them on Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley. The combined estimated economic impact of those events is \$7.9 million, and that is being threatened by the infestation of Asian Carp. Bass tournaments with 200 plus anglers bringing in five fish limits every day are non-existent. Anglers aren't catching 30 - 40 "keeper" bass in a day as was the case a few short years ago. Bass tournaments that annually travel to Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley are now rethinking that decision and are looking for other destinations outside of Kentucky. In June of 2018, an annual bass tournament held out of Kentucky Dam Marina had a decline in participation of 41% from 2017. This is directly attributed to Asian Carp and the affect they are having on our fishery. Each Spring, we host a bass tournament organization from Indiana for their Championship Week. For over 10 years, they have come to Kentucky Lake for 10 days steadily increasing their numbers to almost 1,000 anglers in 2018. The estimated economic impact of this tournament week is \$1.4 million to Marshall County. After this year's tournament, the director indicated that a large number of his anglers complained about the poor fishing and abundance of Asian Carp in Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley, and he worried that his numbers would drastically drop for 2019. He is getting pressure from his membership, and there is a strong possibility that 2019 will be their last trip to Kentucky.

In Spring of 2018, the Kentucky Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau hired a marketing firm to do research on visitation to Kentucky Lake. When asked what activities they engaged in during their visit, visitors responded as follows: 65% fish, 59% swim, 51% boat and 31% canoe/kayak. With the reality of Asian Carp having a tremendous negative impact on fishing at Kentucky Lake, this will affect 65% of our visitors. No area, especially Western Kentucky, can afford the potential decrease of visitation by 65%. Our resorts, bait and tackle stores, restaurants, fishing guide services and other businesses will not recover from a loss that severe.

Our office has been receiving emails, calls and texts concerning the additional affects, aside from fishing, caused by the Asian Carp. Resorts reporting that visitors are considering not returning for annual vacations; potential retirees no longer looking at relocating to Kentucky

Lake, but looking at lakes outside of Kentucky with no Asian Carp; and realtors concerned that property values at the lake will begin to fall drastically as the Asian Carp continue their takeover of our lakes. If the Asian Carp situation is not addressed immediately, I believe our days as a fishing and vacation destination will be long in the past.

Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley are the lifeblood of Western Kentucky. The completion of Kentucky Dam and Barkley Dam gave birth to two of the greatest fishing and boating destinations in the world. For over 70 years, visitors from all over the world have taken time each year to disconnect from their busy lives and reconnect with their families, friends and nature at our lakes. We can no longer stand by and watch the downfall of our lakes caused by Asian Carp.

I believe that with your help, along with the cooperation of state and local governments, a solution can be found to remove and control the population of Asian Carp in our waterways, and someday find a way to eradicate the invasive species.

Thank you for time and consideration this afternoon. It has been an honor. I will be happy to answer any questions.